

VZCZCXRO9705  
PP RUEHROV  
DE RUEHNR #1019/01 1071357  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 161357Z APR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5500  
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY 0046  
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM PRIORITY 5935  
RUEHDJ/AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI PRIORITY 5233  
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA PRIORITY 2766  
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM PRIORITY 2012  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 2786  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 2708  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NAIROBI 001019

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/16/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KE](#)

SUBJECT: KENYA'S MUSLIM GROUPS COMPETE FOR INFLUENCE

REF: A. 07 NAIROBI 4652

[1](#)B. 07 NAIROBI 1639

[1](#)C. 07 NAIROBI 1150

[1](#)D. 07 NAIROBI 628

Classified By: Ambassador Michael E. Ranneberger, reasons 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Now that the dust is starting to settle from December's presidential election, Muslim advocacy groups in Kenya are trying to maximize their influence with the new coalition government and with Kenya's traditionally fractured Muslim community. The upstart National Muslim Leaders' Forum (NAMLEF) appears to be eclipsing the more established Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) in terms of vibrancy and popularity, but NAMLEF's populist resonance also comes with some hardline religious doctrines. Regardless of the infighting, Kenyan Muslims' newfound prominence in parliament should raise the profile of the community's many legitimate grievances and pave the way for addressing them. End Summary.

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Background: Kenyan Muslims Divided  
Ethnically, Regionally, Politically  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) As detailed in ref (D), 10 percent of Kenya's population is Muslim and consists of four ethnic/regional divisions that normally unite over specific issues of Islamic identity -- such as opposition to anti-terror measures (claimed to be discriminatory) -- but otherwise go their own way politically. There is no Muslim "bloc" in Kenya and no religious leader or organization commands national influence among all Kenyan Muslims.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Coastal Muslims make up approximately 60 percent of Kenya's Muslim population and six percent of Kenya's overall population. They account for approximately 50 percent of the population of Coast Province. This community is ethnically divided between indigenous African and Arabic Muslim populations. The Kenyan Somali population, centered in Northeastern Province but with a substantial Nairobi-based component, accounts for about 20 percent of Kenya's Muslims and two percent of Kenya's overall population. They are overwhelmingly Sunni and have both a traditional/Sufi camp and a Wahabist/radical camp. Numerically small Borana (Oromo) and related tribes make up another division of Kenya's Muslim community. These heterodox Cushitic peoples live in remote and sparsely populated north central Kenya and tend not to identify closely with fellow Muslims from elsewhere in Kenya. Finally, Kenya's Muslim community is

rounded out by small Muslim minorities among the predominantly Christian tribes. It also includes Nairobi's Nubian community (Sudanese origin) and Muslim members of the South Asian community outside Coast Province.

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NAMLEF (Upstarts) vs. SUPKEM (Old Guard)

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¶4. (SBU) This diversity, however, has not stopped the rise of organizations attempting to represent Muslims at the national level. SUPKEM, formed in 1973 as an umbrella group for all Muslim organizations in the country, tends to be moderate and pro-government. NAMLEF was formed in response to the 2005 Constitutional Referendum after some Muslim leaders believed that SUPKEM was not assertive enough in its advocacy for Muslim rights. NAMLEF now claims to be the main umbrella organization for Kenya's Muslims and boasts SUPKEM as one of its "members."

¶5. (SBU) The 2007 campaign year was a first for the Muslim community in that both major presidential candidates attempted to win the Muslim vote. NAMLEF endorsed opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) presidential candidate Raila Odinga, who campaigned on a platform of change and signed a memorandum of understanding with NAMLEF to be responsive to Muslim interests (ref A). While SUPKEM did not make any official endorsement, some senior SUPKEM officials openly supported incumbent President Kibaki. SUPKEM officials also criticized the Odinga/NAMLEF understanding (if not because it would have left SUPKEM out of favor under an Odinga regime, then possibly because the group endorsed the wrong candidate).

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¶6. (SBU) ODM won a plurality (99 of 207) of elected seats in parliament (three seats remain vacant). A plurality of elected Muslim parliamentarians (16 of 27) belong to ODM, and the new (ODM) Deputy Speaker of Parliament is a Muslim -- a first. By contrast, only two Muslim parliamentarians belong to President Kibaki's Party of National Unity (PNU). (Note: To his credit, Kibaki appointed two Muslims to his interim cabinet -- PNU's Chirau Ali Mwakwere as Minister of Transport and coalition partner Kenya African National Union's (KANU) Yusuf Haji as Minister of Defense. End Note.)

¶7. (SBU) In return for NAMLEF's endorsement, ODM used two of its six slots for nominated parliamentarians to appoint Muslims based on NAMLEF's recommendation: Sheikh Mohamed Dor, the Chairman of the Council of Imams and Preachers in Kenya (CIPK), will be the first imam to ever sit in Kenya's parliament (ref C). (Note: Sheikh Dor was a vocal proponent of the ODM/NAMLEF memorandum of understanding. End Note.) Safia Abdi Noor heads Womankind Kenya, an NGO based in the arid Northeastern province that promotes women's livelihoods. PNU did not use any of its three slots to nominate Muslim parliamentarians.

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SUPKEM (Moderates) vs. NAMLEF (Conservatives)

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¶8. (SBU) Apart from the general political leanings of SUPKEM and NAMLEF, the two organizations also appear to attract different kinds of Muslims. SUPKEM is dominated by moderates who continue to embrace African traditional practices along with their Islamic faith and participate in ceremonies that other, stricter schools of Islam reject as bidah (innovationist). NAMLEF, on the other hand, appears to attract Muslims whose religious doctrine is more conservative and/or radical (Wahabi and Salafi Muslims tend to support NAMLEF).

¶9. (SBU) As noted, Kenyan Muslims tend to divide themselves along ethnic and clan lines, although these divisions are not absolute. There is a strong divide on the coast, for

instance, between the Arab/Swahili (more conservative) and indigenous African (more moderate) populations. In all areas, however, unemployed and underappreciated youth are vulnerable to radical rhetoric.

¶10. (C) Hassan Ole Naado, the president of the Kenya Muslim Youth Alliance as well as a senior SUPKEM official, raised the alarm once again (see ref B) regarding the spread of radical Islamic practice in Kenya. Radical Wahabists are taking over mosques in places like Eldoret, Kisumu, Nakuru, and Malindi, he recently told PolOff. NAMLEF supports this "radical" approach, which is successful because the "radicals" are younger and better organized than the more moderate religious leaders, he continued. Naado added that he has seen the effect of this radicalization first-hand in the democracy workshops he has conducted (with DHRF funds from the Embassy): young, isolated Muslims who have been exposed to radical teachings believe that "if you support democracy, then you cannot be a Muslim." (Note: Naado personally supported Odinga during the election, but could not "deliver" SUPKEM to ODM. He believes the key to stemming radicalization is by engaging youth in community projects to draw them out of their isolation. End Note.)

¶11. (C) Others who are more sympathetic to NAMLEF see the picture in a completely different way, of course. While those closer to NAMLEF admit to the conservative influence within the organization, they see SUPKEM as having been bought off. Musa Mwale, an official in the Kenya Council of Imams and Ulaama (KCIU) (a NAMLEF affiliate) claimed that CIPK (another NAMLEF affiliate) does more work for the community than SUPKEM, but SUPKEM has always been the entity recognized by the government. Another Embassy interlocutor put it more bluntly: SUPKEM has a reputation of misusing the massive amounts of project money it receives from the government. Because NAMLEF is a relatively new organization, there are no accusations of corruption or failure when it comes to advocating for Muslim rights.

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Muslims in Parliament:  
So far, a Victory for All

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¶12. (C) In spite of the chaos and controversy surrounding the 2007 elections, Muslims appear to be positioned well in parliament. A record number of Muslims were elected (33 -- seven more than in the last parliament). The new Deputy Speaker, Farah Maalim (ODM), is a Muslim from Northeastern province. Maalim's election was made possible by the Kenyan Somali parliamentarians' ability to reach across party lines to support him. (Comment: Odinga has since seen the potential of united Somali support and has promoted Kenyan Somalis to senior advisory positions within the party. While this decision was likely made in part because of problematic behavior on the part of some among his own ethnic Luo support base, it nonetheless benefits Muslims. End Comment.) For the first time, Muslim parliamentarians are forming a caucus and they have just appointed a Muslim whip (Dujis MP (ODM) Adan Barre Duale). NAMLEF recently convened all of the new Muslim parliamentarians to their first caucus meeting. During the meeting, ODM-Kenya parliamentarian Adbi Nassir Nuh reportedly asked why SUPKEM was not present, as he believed that such caucus meetings should be fora for all Muslim interest groups.

¶13. (SBU) So far, the fiery NAMLEF-approved Sheikh Dor has sounded hardline, but in a good way: he recently said he would make it a priority to tackle land reform (a notoriously contentious issue) and to support Muslims countrywide. Given the history of his conservative public positions, however, he may well become a controversial figure in parliament.

¶14. (C) Comment: Kenya's Muslims have a number of legitimate

grievances that date back to the British colonial period and have mounted ever since. These grievances include political marginalization and government and societal discrimination. The difficulty in acquiring identity documents is a frequently cited issue, but inequitable distribution of resources, higher poverty rates, lower school enrollment are also problems among the Muslim population. One reason why SUPKEM's moderate approach is losing support is because of its perceived failure to address those grievances. As NAMLEF's star ascends, it may become more difficult to separate radical rhetoric from the Muslim community's legitimate beefs. Nevertheless, the newly elected Muslim parliamentarians are poised to advocate for their community in a way they never have before. Our efforts to press the government to institutionalize greater political inclusion will help support Kenya's Muslims (and other groups) to fight for equality in the halls of parliament rather than on the streets and fields of Kenya. End Comment.

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